Die Jovis, 31° Januarii 1782.

ORDERED, by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament aſſembled, That the Thanks of this Houſe be and are hereby given to the Lord Biſhop of *Lichfield* and *Coventry*, for his Sermon by him preached before this Houſe on *Wedneſday* laſt, in the Abbey-Church, *Weſtminſter*: And he is hereby deſired to cauſe the ſame to be forthwith printed and publiſhed.

ASHLEY COWPER,
Cler. Parliamentor.

A

SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL,

IN

THE ABBEY-CHURCH, WESTMINSTER,

ON

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 30, 1782:

Being the Day appointed to be obſerved as the Day of the MARTYRDOM of King CHARLES I.

BY

JAMES LORD BISHOP OF LICHFIELD AND COVENTRY.

K Cornwallis 1791

LONDON:

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M.DCC.LXXXII.

ISAIAH xl. 17.

ALL NATIONS BEFORE HIM ARE AS NOTHING, AND THEY ARE COUNTED TO HIM LESS THAN NOTHING, AND VANITY.

VARIOUS are the paſſages of Scripture, that contain declarations of the ſame tendency with reſpect to individuals, as thoſe, which we here find pointed at collective bodies of men. In both caſes they are deſigned to inſpire ſentiments of humility; not indeed in the language of triumph or contempt, but in the ſalutary and neceſſary words of truth.

The

The Prophet, having pronounced the melancholy tidings of the Babyloniſh captivity, ſpake "comfortably to Jeruſalem:" that "her warfare was accompliſhed; her iniquity pardoned." He was aware, however, what danger to the human heart attends even ſmaller gleams of proſperity! How ſudden the tranſition from exceſſive grief to intemperate joy; from vows of conſtancy and perſeverance in virtue and religion to indifference in both, which always terminates in vice and miſery! Nothing, therefore, could have been more ſeaſonably interpoſed than the declarations of the Text; as, by ſetting forth the vanity of all human power, they not only tended to ſupport the ſpirits of the Jews during their captivity, but to check that unguarded degree of exultation, which might break out upon their return. And, if we take into conſideration the farther meaning of the conſolatory prophecy, we may diſcover in them a ſtanding caution againſt the notion ſo prevalent among that people; that the Meſſiah was to be a great temporal prince: for, if all nations before

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him are as nothing, and they are counted to him leſs than nothing, and vanity; could worldly ſplendour, or worldly dominion; could the diſplay of the moſt perfect temporal kingdom, or any temporal advantages reſulting from it, be the great ultimate object of ſo many prophecies, and THE SALVATION of OUR GOD.

But the Prophet in theſe words held out likewiſe a moſt uſeful reflection to all the world in future ages. If, as individuals, we require to be frequently reminded of the vanity of our ſituation, and moral improvement be the offspring of humiliation; do we not, as nations, or collective bodies of men, ſtand in need of an equal attention in this reſpect? The hiſtory of mankind ſurely enforces its neceſſity in very ſtrong terms. How many pages do we there find employed in reciting the violent ſtruggles of pride, envy, and ambition! How few in extolling the meek fruits of the ſpirit, the bleſſed effects of the mild and natural emotions of the uncorrupted heart!

'heart! Hence it was, that David * choſe rather to "fall into the hand of the Lord, than into the hand of man." Hence it was, that a † philoſopher of antiquity undertook to demonſtrate, "how many more men had been deſtroyed by human violence, that is, by wars and ſeditions, than by all other calamities incident to our nature." ‖ "What ſea, what country," exclaimed the Roman poet, "hath not been diſcoloured by our blood?" A repreſentation, which, as it is ſcarcely heightened by poetic fancy, and relates to the effects of civil commotions, delivers down to poſterity a melancholy deſcription of the moſt refined as well as powerful ſtate in his days. But his were days of heatheniſm. Thoſe, however, of Chriſtianity, ſo far from preſenting to our view a more pleaſing and tranquil ſcene, have diſplayed the naked ſword almoſt without inter-

* 2 Sam. xxiv. † Dicæarchus. Cic. de Off. L. ii. 5. ‖ Hor. L. ii. Od. 1.

miſſion,

miſſion, and ſometimes even with a ſharper edge, whetted by enthuſiaſtic zeal.

Better hopes might have been entertained after the bleſſed Reformation in thoſe countries, where it took place; and where its happy conſequences have been in other inſtances ſo highly beneficial; as it not only opened the Scriptures to more general inſpection, but excited alſo a more general inquiry into their precepts. Chriſtianity, however, even thus unfettered, ſeems to have failed in producing that true ſpirit of moderation, which is its genuine fruit: whilſt it hath extended many branches of charity, which belong to the private character, its lenient ſeeds have not equally proſpered in influencing public conduct.

And, indeed, it muſt be confeſſed, that the annals of this country have but too fully confirmed the truth of this obſervation. Although ſhe had experienced her

ſhare, and perhaps more than her ſhare of civil broils at former periods; although ſhe had ſeen years of confuſion and miſery ariſing from the family conteſts; what evils did ſhe not feel from the animoſities, which induced and followed the tranſaction of this day! A laudable reſiſtance to ſome unwarrantable exertions of kingly power gave riſe, in the ſubſequent ſtages of the diſpute, to a tranſgreſſion of all bounds of moderation; and produced much greater abridgments of liberty than thoſe, which had been at firſt ſo juſtly apprehended. To what then were the many public and private calamities, nurtured by this contention, to be aſcribed; but to the unhappy prevalence of thoſe turbulent and malevolent paſſions, which, inſtead of being brought into obedience, as revelation every where inculcates, ruled with the moſt deſpotic ſway? This was an age too, when texts of ſcripture, ſo far from being diſregarded, were ſought out with wonderful diligence: not indeed, as in more modern times, for the purpoſes

of

of ridicule, but with no leſs evil intentions; in order to the perverſion of them, and to render them ſubſervient to every frantic and every wicked attempt. If, however, the general tendency of the inſpired writings, inſtead of detached ſentences, had been duly attended to by the principal actors in thoſe days; had they called to mind that there is One, before whom "all nations are as nothing, and leſs than nothing and vanity," thoſe intemperate proceedings on all ſides, which were evidently dictated by bitter envyings and worldly ambition, would have yielded to the meekneſs of wiſdom; which, as it is "from above," from Him, who "REIGNETH OVER ALL," ought ſurely to clothe us with humility and forbearance.

It is, indeed, a due ſenſe of our ſituation with reſpect to our Heavenly Father, which can alone give a proper and well directed activity to private or public life. Under this impreſſion, all will be well in the hour of

retirement, in our ſocial intercourſe, in our political career. Under this impreſſion, every aſpiring thought will perceive a timely check; whilſt that, which humbleth itſelf, will be exalted.

Nor will the natural dictates of ſuch pious feelings ever ſubject us to the inconveniencies, ariſing out of unwarrantable concluſions from them; and reduce us to a ſtate of inactivity with reſpect to the affairs of this world. A conviction of the great diſtance there is between us and our Heavenly Parent can never properly lead to inactive reſolutions. It muſt ſurely ſuggeſt a reverence for Him, and conſequently a deſire to pleaſe Him; and, if ſo, can it induce us not to employ thoſe talents, which he hath been graciouſly pleaſed to commit to our charge? Will it not rather encourage the employing of them in the furtherance of virtuous deſigns, which, as they contribute to the happineſs of His creatures, muſt neceſſarily redound to his honour?

Beſides,

Beſides, as it raiſes our notions of the attributes of God, and ſets forth His ſuperior excellence; it leads to a greater veneration for whatever he hath revealed, and an eagerneſs to embrace and adopt it. And this is of the utmoſt importance to us, as citizens, as well as men; ſince our provident Creator hath been pleaſed to afford us, in His revelation, ample inſtruction upon every ſubject of duty. We there diſcover whatever may be uſeful or beneficial to us, whatever may tend to our temporal as well as eternal happineſs. And if not every thing, that an unreaſonable claimant may expect; certainly all that Infinite Wiſdom, Juſtice, and Goodneſs thought fit to impart.

But it hath been ſaid, that Chriſtianity hath left the CIVIL RIGHTS of mankind undefined—be it ſo—if, however, it hath not defined them and deſcribed their reſpective limits, it hath not withholden from us the beſt helps toward this attainment. " Where the ſpirit

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of the Lord is," where the principles of the goſpel are well eſtabliſhed, " there is liberty." And although the Apoſtle perhaps in this paſſage confined the expreſſion to freedom of ſpeech or freedom from Jewiſh ceremonies, it is equally applicable to all reaſonable freedom of action; for where are ſuch true and genuine ſources of CIVIL LIBERTY to be diſcovered, as in the mild and merciful rules every where enforced in the goſpel? Theſe rules are indeed, in many inſtances, general and unapplied: ſince there would be otherwiſe no exerciſe of the mind, which is of admirable uſe towards retaining any principles; and is a circumſtance evidently attended to in the goſpel from the parabolical mode of inſtruction adopted in it. Beſides, as our Bleſſed Lord was not to overturn the principalities and powers of this world; as his weapons were not carnal but ſpiritual; and the force, which he employed, that of perſwaſion, love, and charity; it was ſurely conſiſtent with the character of his divine

miſſion

miſſion to aim at the alteration of the principles, rather than at the ſudden ſubverſion of the practices of men.

The Chriſtian precepts are no leſs favourable to the juſt ſupport of CIVIL AUTHORITY. They check the exorbitancy of our paſſions by ſubſtracting from the number of the objects, which inflame them; and, by fixing the intrinſic value of thoſe they approve according to the ſtandard of uncorrupted reaſon and pure religion, they moderate our deſire of them. By recommending meekneſs, they ſtop the overflowings of reſentment: by cheriſhing brotherly love, they tend to promote unanimity, and an intercourſe of kind, not malevolent offices; teaching men "in honour to prefer one another," that is, others to themſelves. Thus, by inſpiring the members of the ſtate to act with united powers, they give them efficiency; and impart that degree of weight and ſtability to the whole, which ſecures it againſt any ſudden concuſſion. They require us likewiſe "to

obey

obey not only for wrath, but alſo for conſcience ſake;" and thus obtain a moſt extenſive influence. For craft, preſuming that it may elude the vigilance of the magiſtrate, therefore ventures on private injuries; but it can never hope to eſcape the obſervance of Him, "who ſeeth in ſecret." Popular combinations may publicly ſubvert a government, and be too ſtrong for civil puniſhment; but they muſt ſtand expoſed to the animadverſion of Him, who knoweth the motives of actions, trieth the heart, and hath ordained "fear to whom fear, and honour to whom honour." An awful ſenſe therefore of God, by inducing the admiſſion and obſervance of his revealed will, gives efficacy to the laws, which are eſtabliſhed for the public good, at the ſame time that it inculcates the true fundamental principles of civil freedom.

But there are farther advantages to be derived from the reflections ſuggeſted by the words of the prophet. If we are perſuaded that "all nations before Him are as nothing

nothing, and they are counted to Him leſs than nothing and vanity," can we doubt of His power ; that all things are poſſible with Him ? And, if His power be admitted, His interpoſition in the direction of human affairs follows of courſe, unleſs His wiſdom and goodneſs be arraigned ; for theſe, and other expreſſions of the ſame kind, are to be underſtood only as aſcertaining His power, and not as conveying any want of attention in Him. It is the characteriſtic of human frailty to overlook all ſmaller objects on account of their inferiority ; but it is the prerogative of Divine Perfection to comprehend every, even the moſt minute part of the creation. The Divine Eye pervades, and the Divine Providence protects the whole. An atom is preſerved as well as the towering mountain : a reptile as well as the proudeſt animal. But, if things of ſmaller import engage the attention of God, we have the higheſt authority for aſſerting a ſuperior degree of it to thoſe of greater. After reminding his diſciples that our Heavenly Father feedeth the fowls of the air,

our Saviour adds, " Are ye not much better than they ?" Better, as more immediate inſtruments in bringing about His gracious purpoſes; and as capable of imitating the divine goodneſs, the eſtabliſhment of which muſt be His great deſign, as appears by all His works as well as revelations. Whilſt then the whole creation partakes of His providential care, the human race are for this reaſon more peculiarly bleſſed with it. And as the conduct of individuals among them is greatly influenced by cuſtoms, laws, and regulations authorized by collective bodies of men, we may conclude them to be in their collective capacity under His more immediate direction and government: that he employs national rewards and puniſhments: and that, therefore, ſo far from protecting, He will ſubvert the ſtrength of any nation, where the power of obſtructing His will is extenſive in proportion to that ſtrength; unleſs He diſcover in it a prevailing conformity to thoſe principles, which lead to the accompliſhment of His great, His benevolent, and virtuous purpoſes.

Upon the whole then, if ſuch are the concluſions to be deduced from the humiliating words of the prophet, they may ſurely be deemed of a moſt beneficial tendency; and enforced with peculiar propriety and advantage, when we advert to ſtriking and awful periods of hiſtory. Hiſtorical writers arrogate to their works the praiſe, which is due from an attempt to inſtruct as well as pleaſe. To diſplay the motives and effects of conduct, the virtues and vices of thoſe, who have governed ſtates, with the characters and views of thoſe, whom they have governed, is to furniſh the mind with the uſeful materials of practical information; from which concluſions may be formed, beyond the reach of the merely ſpeculative reaſoner.

Since general hiſtory then offers ſuch beneficial conſequences, and opens ſuch copious channels of inſtruction; a proportional benefit may be derived from conſidering detached parts of it, or the cauſes and ef-

facts of particular events. And here too our own hiſtory ſupplies us with a ſtriking inſtance in ſupport of this obſervation. For, towards the cloſe of the laſt century, when the Proteſtant religion, and our excellent laws were in the moſt imminent danger, and a change of government was abſolutely neceſſary; the nation, having profited by recent experience, became neither the dupe of ambition nor of hypocriſy; we behold the genuine exertions of liberty uniformly purſued in the commencement, and not departed from in the concluſion of the glorious Revolution.

Solemn references therefore to the moſt intereſting parts of their national hiſtory cannot fail of yielding the beſt fruits to thoſe, who govern; and to thoſe alſo, who are the objects of government: but no ſuperſtructure can be depended upon, either for utility or permanency, where the foundation hath not been ſufficiently guarded, and conſiſts not of proper materials: nor will

theſe references be found to produce uſeful or permanent qualities, unleſs reſorted to, when the mind is duly fortified by pious as well as moral reflections. So that days of public humiliation, which call upon us to abſtract ourſelves from the glittering and deluſive purſuits of this world, and to place our thoughts upon Him, "in whom we live, move, and have our being," prepare us in the beſt manner for making the true uſe of what is ſuggeſted by thoſe great changes, which are ſo evidently the effects of Divine interpoſition.

Would to God there were not at preſent a more than ordinary neceſſity for the moſt preſſing admonitions upon this ſubject; both from the general character of the age, and the heavy chaſtiſements now hanging over us.

Deeply

Deeply ſenſible then of our unworthineſs as well as of our ſufferings, let us turn unto the Lord with all our hearts. Not as in the times, to which we have been alluding, with the enthuſiaſtic fervour of miſtaken piety and miſguided zeal; but in the true ſpirit of Chriſtianity, the ſpirit of love, of meekneſs, of moderation. Then ſhall we perceive and acknowledge, that the ſure foundation of civil liberty, as well as the due ſtrength of civil authority, can only be derived from the calm influence of Religion.

Nor are theſe attainments the only advantages, which ſhe can diſpenſe to us. She hath other "ways of pleaſantneſs, and other paths of peace." She can teach every individual to do his country ſome ſervice: that, inſtead of contributing to fill up the meaſure of its iniquity, he may, by the ſincerity of his repentance; by the goodneſs of his life; and by the fervency of his prayers,

prayers, aſſiſt in recommending it to an Almighty Protector, " all whoſe works are truth, as well as his ways judgment :" who " will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever."

THE END.

THE END

A

SERMON

Preached before the

Incorporated SOCIETY

FOR THE

Propagation of the Goſpel in Foreign Parts;

AT THEIR

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

IN THE

Pariſh Church of ST. MARY-LE-BOW,

On FRIDAY *February* 21, 1800.

By the Right Reverend

HENRY REGINALD Lord Biſhop of *EXETER.*

LONDON:

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MDCCC.